

CHALLENGE STATEMENT

Logistics

PRAC: Rental Assistance During the Pandemic

BACKGROUND

About the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee (PRAC)

The Pandemic Response Accountability Committee (PRAC) is responsible for overseeing \$5 trillion in emergency aid appropriated by Congress to help fight the health and economic impacts of the pandemic. Our mission is to inform the public and policymakers where the relief money went, how it was used, and to detect fraud, waste, and abuse of pandemic spending.

The PRAC created a website, PandemicOversight.gov, that enables the public to understand how their tax dollars were used to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The website is loaded with interactive dashboards that contain detailed data on more than 21 million pandemic assistance awards in 450 programs, like the Paycheck Protection Program and the Emergency Rental Assistance Program.

Background: Emergency Rental Assistance

Congress created the Emergency Rental Assistance Program in December 2020 to help people struggling to pay rent or utilities during the pandemic. Part of the program's goal is to help prevent evictions (a national eviction moratorium ended in August 2021 and was not extended).

The program received \$46 billion in funding, and the federal government provided the funds to state and local governments for them to distribute to qualified individuals. In the absence of national eviction data, the funding was distributed based on population, with state and local governments (those with more than 200,000 residents) getting a minimum allocation of \$200 million.

Allocating rental assistance based on population rather than demonstrated need affected the pace of spending and the percentage of total funds distributed to the target population. For example, some states said they received too much money because they have more homeowners than renters. Other locations ran out of money due to high demand, a strong indication they were underfunded.

Pandemic relief programs are also supposed to ensure an [equitable response and recovery](#). A 2021 Executive Order [defines underserved communities](#), but it is unclear if rent relief has flowed appropriately to these communities.

[More information about the Emergency Rental Assistance Program](#)

CHALLENGE STATEMENT

Many state and local governments are planning on using funding from other pandemic relief programs to supplement the Emergency Rental Assistance Program. In doing so, officials may need to think differently about how they allocate these funds so that rental assistance gets to those most in danger of being evicted.

In the absence of a national database on evictions, how can governments target relief to help alleviate rental debt and reduce evictions in underserved communities?

KEY CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- What national economic or socioeconomic data could policymakers use to distribute rent relief effectively, efficiently, and equitably?
 - What challenges exist if we rely on that data to distribute relief in future crises?
- What data from the existing Emergency Rental Assistance program can be used to inform other current and possible future rent relief programs?
- How else could rent relief be distributed from the federal government? Should it be sent directly to individuals, non-profits, or state/local governments?
- Are there non-monetary benefits or policies (excluding moratoriums) that could be used to reduce rental debt and the possibility of evictions?
- What are possible risks to accept in exchange for getting money out quickly?

DATA

- [Emergency Rental Assistance monthly reports](#)
- U.S. Census data ([Data \(census.gov\)](#))
- Eviction rates ([The Eviction Tracking System | Eviction Lab](#))
- USAspending ([COVID Relief Spending | USAspending](#))

EXAMPLES

Examples of current state dashboards for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program.

[Rhode Island](#)

[Maryland](#)

ARTICLES:

Articles explaining early challenges in program

[Only a Fraction of COVID-19 Rental Assistance Has Gone Out \(Wall Street Journal\)](#)

[Feds report most rental assistance has still not gone out \(AP News\)](#)